



The Holiday Top Ten; A Survival Guide for Your Pet

The holidays are wonderful times for families and friends. But they aren't without risks for our animal companions. Here's a short list of some things to consider as you prepare for your holiday gatherings...

1. VISITORS

Pets can sometimes be overexcited, confused, or frightened by the onslaught of holiday guests. You can help by keeping your pet in a quiet part of the house, and making sure he/she has a safe retreat from children and well-intentioned visitors. Keep your pet's bed or kennel in a safe place and be sure guests know that it's off limits.

2. CHOCOLATE

Many of the items we keep in our homes can be toxic to pets. Chocolate consumption is a serious pet poisoning risk, especially for dogs. Chocolate contains a chemical called theobromine, which can be fatally toxic to dogs if they eat enough of it. And dogs aren't famous for their ability to control their appetites! Furthermore, the types of chocolate we find in our kitchens at holiday times, like bittersweet or baking chocolate, contain far more theobromine than the average Hershey bar. If your dog gets into some chocolate, be sure to call your veterinarian or the Animal Poison Control Center immediately to see if your pet needs medical attention.

3. TINSEL

Long, skinny pieces of plastic or string can be very dangerous to our furry friends. Cats and kittens seem to find shiny tinsel especially appealing. If eaten, thin pieces of string or tinsel can cause the intestines to bunch up, and can even cut through the intestinal wall! Either could be fatal, and would certainly mean a trip to the veterinarian's office.

4. ELECTRIC CORDS

Light strands, loose wires, and electric cords can be a serious hazard to your pet. Some animals, especially puppies, may chew cords and put themselves at risk of serious burns or electric shock. So, how can you tell if your dog or cat has been electrocuted? The animal may appear normal immediately after the injury. However, approximately 1-36 hours following the chewing incident, pulmonary edema starts to develop. This means that the lungs begin to fill with fluid and the animal displays very labored breathing, with an increased breathing rate and coughing. It looks like the animal can't catch his or her breath. Another clue that your pet has been chewing on an electrical cord, is that the tongue or lips may have a white or seared area across it.

5. NOISEMAKERS

Kids and adults alike enjoy celebrating with fireworks, horns, bells, and whistles. But to the sensitive ears of our pets, these can be extremely frightening. If you anticipate that some fireworks or noisemakers will be within earshot of your pets, make sure your pet is in a safe place away from the noise. Also, be certain that your pet isn't able to escape the house or yard. If fireworks are a particular problem for your pet around holidays like New Year's,

talk to your veterinarian about the possibility of getting some medications to help your pet through these stressful times.

6. ORNAMENTS

As you deck the halls, trim the tree, or light the menorah, keep in mind that pets don't understand the words "breakable," "family heirloom," or "sentimental value." Rambunctious dogs, cats, and ferrets have been known to topple many an ornament and knick-knack, and sometimes even whole Christmas trees. You can help prevent breaks and mishaps by keeping weighty ornaments close to the floor, and valuable ornaments out of reach from curious mouths, noses, and wagging tails. Keep knick-knacks on shelves inaccessible to your animal companions. Also, make sure Christmas trees are tethered to a nearby wall or window frame if you have ferrets or cats fond of climbing!



7. CANDLES

The dancing flames and shadows thrown by candles are tantalizing to pets. But disaster can strike in an instant if a candle is toppled by a curious animal, or worse still, if a pet sets him/herself alight. Of course, candles should never be left burning unattended. But also make sure pets are kept a safe distance from lit candles for their own safety and ours.

8. DECORATIVE PLANTS

Some plants and greenery like Holly, Ivy, and Mistletoe can be very toxic if a pet ingests them. For a full list of toxic plants, you can check <http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/poison-control/> If you have an emergency, you can call the animal poison control hotline at 1 (888) 426-4435.



9. OVEREATING

We aren't the only ones who sometimes take too much of a good thing. Table scraps, garbage raiding, and counter surfing can add up to lots of rich food in your pet's stomach, which may lead to stomach upset. Even worse, too much rich food can lead to serious inflammation of the pancreas, which can be life-threatening. Stick to your pet's normal diet—even though he/she may encourage you not to!

10. NEW PETS

Many of us love the thought of surprising somebody with a new puppy or kitten on Christmas morning. Unfortunately, it's difficult to find a time that's worse for bringing a new pet into the home! The holiday household is full of hustling and bustling, decorations, toys, treats, and sometimes even a little bit of stress! All of the excitement can cause a new pet to be confused or overstimulated. If you've decided it's time for a new family member, wait until the week AFTER the holiday, puppy- or kitten-proof the house, and introduce your new pet into a quiet, safe environment. Don't forget to ask your veterinarian for advice on selecting your new pet!

